

1922
B91

THE IRONIC REALISM OF ALFRED CAPUS

BY

OLAV DOBBINS BURGE

THESIS

FOR THE

DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS

IN

FRENCH

COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS AND SCIENCES

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

1922

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B91

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

--May 27-----1922--

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY

OLAV DOBBINS BURGE

ENTITLED THE IRONIC REALISM OF ALFRED CAPUS

IS APPROVED BY ME AS FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS IN FRENCH

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

I wish to express my thanks for the forbearance and aid that Dr. Arthur Hamilton has show me in the preparation of this paper.

TABLE OF CONTENTS.

Chapter I.

BIOGRAPHICAL.

Chapter II.

THE LITERARY NATURE OF CAPUS.

Chapter III.

CAPUS AND LUCK.

Chapter IV.

CAPUS AND DIVORCE.

Chapter V.

CAPUS AND THE NEW WOMAN.

Chapter VI.

CAPUS AND HIGH FINANCE.

Chapter VII.

CONCLUSION.

Chapter I

Biographical.

Although his day is near its close, Alfred Capus is perhaps now one of the most enjoyed of the French comic dramatists. He is not the typical popular dramatist of the day, who folds his tent and silently steals away as soon as the night is upon him. He is not, to use an American comparison, a man who is as Avery Hopwood, who writes a naughty play or two and then subsides in favor of his more lucky successor who can satisfy the more present wants of the fickle public in a better fashion. He has succeeded as few men do in giving the public what it wants. It has not always been what the critics wanted, but it has got by, and if we are to believe the French Academy, it will continue to get by for years to come, for Capus is now one of the immortals.

Capus is a son of the South. He was born at Aix, Provence, in 1858. His early years were spent there, and after some preliminary schooling at Toulon, he went to Paris at the age of fourteen. Fourteen is a very impressionable age, and the city of light fascinated him. Thereupon, he had the ambition, and who is to say whether it was a lofty one or not, of becoming a true boulevardier. But this first flush did not prevent him from pursuing his first intentions of becoming a mining engineer, and he accordingly entered a technical school. But this noble will power seems to have faded, for after a few years of half-hearted study, or so we are led to believe, he failed to get the degree that would make him a full-fledged engineer.

He saw that he had been wrong in choosing his life's work, and that practical science was not the field in which he would do his best work. In this he was not alone, for many another French author has had the same beginning, among whom one may number Maurice Donnay. But the young Capus had the problem of earning a living before him, and he followed his inclinations. He made his first venture into the field of letters in collaboration with a certain L. Vonoven in a volume of short stories and sketches called Les Honnêtes Gens. How successful this attempt was is not known. It must have been fairly so, for the next year the collaborators had a play, Le Mari malgré lui, produced at the Théâtre Cluny.

This literary seems soon to have dissolved, for Capus spent the next three years in looking for a permanent position. When one spends that length of time in looking for something to give a livelihood, he is pretty sure to reach grievous straits before long. He knew all the experiences of the struggling young author. We do not know whether he lived in a garret in the conventional fashion or not, or whether he subsisted on rye bread and onions, sometimes on rye bread, and sometimes on onions, and when he was flush on both, or not, but we do know that his life was anything but easy during these three long years.

At the end of this time, and with nothing in sight, it is needless to say that Capus was in a rather gloomy state of mind, and had just resigned himself to leaving France to practice his half-learned profession abroad. But at the right time his chance came, and he was encouraged to stick a little

longer. The fates, by some whimsy or other, granted him a small sum of money, through the very timely death of a relative, and Capus started on his quest anew.

Not long after this, about 1882, he got a position on Le Clairon, a Paris newspaper, through the kind offices of his friends Paul Hervieu and Marcel Prevost. The next year he had the chance to better himself on a new review, Les Grimaces, under the leadership of Octave Mirbeau, and it is needless to say that he accepted it without delay. Then a little later he went to the staff of Le Gaulois. By this time Capus was attracting some attention, and had begun to contribute to various periodicals, such as L'Echo de Paris, L'Illustration, and La Revue Bleue. Meantime he was writing novels, four of which appeared before his first play. The are: Qui Perd Gagne, 1890, Faux Départs, 1891, Monsieur veut Rire, 1893, and Années d'Aventures, 1894. The year that his last novel appeared, he changed positions once more, this time going to the staff of Figaro, where he has remained to this day. He is at present joint editor of the paper with Robert de Flers. In 1914 Capus was made a member of the French Academy.

Capus is unmarried and belongs to no secret societies.

Chapter II.

THE LITERARY NATURE OF CAPUS.

Mr. Frank W. Chandler in his "Contemporary Drama of France" calls Capus an 'ironic realist,' and goes on to explain himself. To his mind a realist is a man whose task is "to face the facts of life rather than to fly from them, to resist the temptation merely to record such facts, rather than to subject them to an intelligent ordering (as Sardou does), to look upon the actual unafraid, neither depressed or elate, -- such is the business of the realist" (2). But Capus is more than this sort of dramatist to him, and he goes on to define the ironic realist. Says he: "Ironic realists are those whose temperament necessarily affects their reactions upon observed reality, who stand apart from the human drama, amused or scornful, but prepared to interpret without undue intrusions of heart or conscience (3)." All of which is very well.

It does not seem that either of these definitions are entirely suited to the dramatist Capus. He is not a realist in the sense that Chandler would have him. To my mind the realism of Capus is a qualified realism, a realism that he has made for himself, although it is real enough for stage purposes. In a lecture Capus is credited with having said in reference to modern society that it does not lend itself readily to dramatic treatment, "for to use a metaphor from photography, it will never sit still long enough to be snapped." (4). Which seems true enough. But to pursue the photographic metaphor a little farther, it is possible to make "stills" of

it, in the manner that our moving pictures do. Capus has posed his personages in the best studio manner. His plots and scenes are well within the bounds of reality, but they have been made so by the hands of the artist with selected materials. In ordinary life, whose portrayal is the self-imposed duty of the realist, one would hardly expect to find thrown together such characters as Brignol, the Commandant Brunet, and his nephew Maurice, whom we find in Brignolet sa fille. They are real enough characters in themselves, but they have had their milieu chosen for them. Of course Capus can lay the whole matter at the feet of luck, as he is inclined to do in many of his plays, but that would be rather overworking coincidence.

For the realism of Capus is distinctly a different one from that of Brieux, or of Porto Riche, or of Curel, or of Lavedan, if only the more representative plays are considered. That may, of course, be laid to the fact that Capus is a comic dramatist, but that does not entirely explain away the difficulty in definition. The inclinations of the man Capus have been such that he has been compelled to use the particular genre that he has, to gain the ends he is seeking. For he is a man of his own will, and is not likely to be swayed to a very great extent by principles and theories. He has not been a realist purposely, but has rather fallen into it as being the most convenient for his needs. His needs may be said to be dictated by a cynic and boulevardier, who is not interested in the ordinary for its own sake, but only in so far as he can use it for his own ends. As a result of this he writes as he does.

In the matter of Capus' irony, one is somewhat at a loss as to what to say. Chandler says that he is ironic, and several other critics find that he has this peculiar quality. There is classic irony and romantic irony, but whoever heard of realistic irony?

Irony one finds defined as "a form of speech in which the real meaning is concealed or contradicted by the words." The same source goes on to define classic, or tragic, irony as follows: "In this form of irony the words and actions of the characters belie the real situation, which the spectators fully realize. It may take several forms; the character speaking may be conscious of the irony of his words while the rest of the actors may not, or he may be unconscious and the actors share the knowledge with the spectators, or the spectators may alone realize irony. The Oedipus Tyrannus of Sophocles is the classic example of tragic irony at its fullest and finest." (5)

This is particularly applicable to that drama which treats of subjects familiar to the audience, so that it follows the lines of the play, as its author has conceived it and always keeps in close intellectual contact with him. But that can not be done in the case of the comic realist, as is Capus.

Nor does the idea of romantic irony seem to apply, although Capus may be called something of a sentimentalist. Says one writer: "The romantic realist.... is ready to mock at his own convictions" (6). One doubts whether Capus is ready to do this or not, although he may be mocking at something. The

writer above quoted goes on to say:" the romantic realist shatters the illusion wantonly. It is as though he would inflict the disillusion on others from which he himself has suffered."(7)

This may perhaps be what Chandler meant when he called Capus an ironic realist, a man that has looked upon life and found that it has not nearly the grandeur that its press agents have assigned it. For we must remember that Capus is a boulevardier, that to be one was one of his first ambitions, and that he devoted himself for some time to perfecting himself in that métier. And a boulevardier is no Rousseauistic romanticist, or little brother of the poor, nor a man of any great faith. He is by nature a cynic and a doubter, one who mocks and is scornful. He has found life rather empty and without any special meaning, and he has the bad habit, one might say, of breaking his spoiled eggs before the rest of deluded humanity.

But one must not get the idea that Capus is a pessimist. For he is anything but that. He finds no little enjoyment in life as it is, although he does it with his tongue in his cheek, and he goes to bed every night with the contented knowledge that it is not worth a candle.

Capus, it must be remembered, is a native of the South, and whoever heard of such a man being a pessimist, or going mad, or shooting himself unless it was over a love affair? Capus has nature to help him in keeping a certain optimism, but the boulevard has also made him something of a cynic, paradoxical as it may seem.

Then there is another thing that disproves any pessimism on the part of Capus. Along back at the time of the Théâtre Libre, and the beginning of naturalism, there was a sort of counter movement started to counteract the gloomy and hopeless plays of such men as Zola and others. There was no definite school that we know of that had such an avowed purpose, but if it be assumed that there was such a school, one critic says: "The school M. Capus belonged to reacted against this dogma (i.e. that a play to be realistic had to be gloomy and pessimistic), discovered a new way of being modern, invented a theater designed to prove that plays without pessimism needn't taste as if the modern salt had been left out". (8)

As a result the earlier plays are particularly optimistic. One may imagine Capus saying to himself: "The average human is morally down at heel, but what of it so long as many human beings, not a bit above the average, are kindly and lively and worth listening to?" (9) And says the critic: "To save the optimism of this kind from fatuity was easy for M. Capus, who tempered it with many strokes of tart observation and by a humour that seems indifferent to its truth." (10)

And if perhaps M. Capus lost a little of his optimism in his later plays, it is not so grave a thing, for he still has his gift of amusing us.

His irony, then, reduces itself to a certain light cynicism, a certain scorn of things as they are that a man of Capus' nature and habitat can not help but have, and which are perhaps rather salutary in the long run. They give one an aloofness that is very protective.

In considering the works of Alfred Capus ,a great deal of time and trouble will be saved if only the better plays are taken into account. The others when read , give one the impression that they are very thin stuff, and that their author must have been in need of money, or suffering from a case of bad judgement when he allowed them to be published. According to Barret H. Clark "in forming a critical judgement of Capus' work ,we should of course take into account the seven or eight really significant plays...La Veine, Brignol et sa fille, Les Deux Ecoles, La Petite Fonctionnaire, Rosine, Les Maris de Léontine,"(11). And according to Chandler we may possibly add two others that Capus wrote in collaboration: L'Aventurier, and L'Attentat. And to make the list as representative as possible, without making it too long, one might add La Bourse ou la vie.

Scrutiny shall be directed, then, toward these plays especially, in a consideration of Capus as an ironic realist.

Chapter III.

CAPUS AND LUCK.

Long before Capus had ever written a play he had taken exception to the rule that early to bed and early to rise make a man healthy, wealthy, and wise and that a penny saved is a penny earned. There is not a copy of Annees d'Aventure to be had, but I believe that it is somewhere in that novel that Capus philosophizes to this effect:

"Quelle illusion de croire que les événements de notre existence s'enchainent et se commandent! Notre vie est une courte série d'anecdotes racontées sans lien; notre âme est changeante et variable comme elle; nos sentiments sont aussi imprévus que des rêves; et ce sont des lois éternellement ignorées qui nous donnent avec indifférence les joies et les peines, les matins lumineux, les heures lourdes et obscures." (12)

This is not a very profound philosophy, but then what can one expect from a native of the South, a boulevardier, and a skeptic? It is a philosophy, but a philosophy of a Tartarin, or to go further East, an Omar Khayam.

But it is not the philosophy of a man who is faithful to his wife and who commutes daily and eats three heavy meals a day and is satisfied with the world as he has found it. It is the philosophy of a man who is not satisfied with the traditional order of things, who believes that axioms alone can not make a man successful, that no matter how many "success" or "personality" books he may read, he can not achieve his coveted ends unless his most capricious mistresses, the fates, have it in their mind to help him. And that, of course, has its basis in a very old philosophy of the Greeks. Fatalism,

we are told, was the philosophy of a dying race and the child of blasphemous and heterodox paganism. But cannot a man, and a good Christian at that, be the exponent of this creed, if he be cynical enough?

That is the state that Capus is in when he preached "everything will come out all right in the end" as he does in Brignol et sa fille, his first play.

In this play we have Brignol, a dreamer, who is constantly on the point of closing some very advantageous business transaction but never quite finishes, who has come to Paris because he has not been able to make a living in his native provincial city. This move has been made in spite of the vigorous protests of his brother-in-law, Valpierre, and of that worthy man's wife. His condition has not been appreciably bettered as we see in the very first scene, wherein the concierge is shown trying to get the last half year's rent, but is put off with the most extravagant promises. And to make things worse, Valpierre and wife are due to arrive in a last attempt to bring Brignol back to reason, as these worthy provincials see it. This move does not succeed, and things are made still worse when the Commandant Brunet comes to reclaim some thrity thousand francs that he has entrusted to Brignol, in order not to lose them at baccarat. Brignol has of course invested them in some will-o'-the-wisp money making scheme and has succeeded in losing the entire amount. Things begin to look very dark. Happily the nephew of the irascible Brunet happens along, and is very much taken with Cécile, Brignol's partner and daughter. The uncle is in anything but a sweet temper at

the thought of not being able to lose all his funds at baccarat, and threatens everything, including a lawsuit, in which Brignol, for obvious reasons, does not wish to become involved. Maurice being somewhat groggy from his first view of Cécile, agrees to bring Brunet back to reason. He does this and gains Brignol a little time in which to get the money. But the money can not be got, and Maurice finally has to loan the amount to Brignol. Love is blind. He rises quite appreciably in the esteem of Brignol, and as much so in the esteem of Cécile, thereby making the affair quite inexpensive for him. He frequents the Brignol household a great deal, and gives them theatre tickets and looks out for them in various small ways. Meantime Brignol has become involved with a certain man of affairs, Carriard, who has promised Brignol a very substantial position in a factory that he is buying, in exchange for the hand of Cécile. Brignol with the best intentions in the world has agreed to this, but when the time comes for final settlement, he is not so sure, for he is pretty certain that Cécile is in love with Maurice, and he is inclined to think that Maurice will make the better and more desirable husband of the two. At last the news has to be broken to Carriard that he is the loser, and he becomes as wrathful as the Commandant has been over certain sums of money that he has lent Brignol. Then there comes a serious note in the play. It occurs to Mme. Brignol that Cécile is well on the way to being compromised, for she has doubts as to the intentions of Maurice, of which the young man himself is not any too sure. He has been around the house continually, but has exhibited no matrimonial incli-

nations as yet. To avoid any nasty consequences, the family agrees that Cécile shall be packed off to Poitiers with her uncle. When Maurice hears this, he makes up his mind, with the aid of his uncle Brunet, and everything comes out as it should. There is only a lawsuit hanging over Brignol's head with Carriard, but he is confident that everything will come out all right. And for a paternal benediction to his daughter he says: "Eh bien, vous le voyez...tout s'arrange!" (13)

This was the first play that Capus had tried by himself and there are numerous faults that are found in every playwright's first work. The dialogue, for instance, is far different from that of ten years later. The speeches are too long as a whole, and many a good situation has not been made all that it might have been. A case in point is Scene 7 of Act III. It is the only big scene that Maurice and Cécile have, and interesting as it is, it is not as great as it might have been. As was said before the speeches are too long, some of them being as many as forty lines in length. Lovers, even in the situation that the pair was in are never as oratorical as Capus has made them. There is a great deal more thought than is said, thoughts are advanced timidly, and perhaps never finished, and there is a great reserve that we do not find in our lovers of this scene. And there are other instances of this same oversight, the working up to a good scene, and then bungling it, but the dialogue is anything but boring. It is merely not as smooth as it is to become later in the dramatist's career.

The realism of the play, as before mentioned, is a somewhat selected realism. The personages of the play are

taken from the bourgeoisie, and as members of that class are all that they should be. Brignol has a hundred prototypes in very large cities and in no matter what country. And they have, except in rare instances, wives and daughters very like Mme. and Mlle. Brignol. The character of Brunet is true, perhaps, but is undoubtedly less known than that of the others. Maurice is an every day enough young man. The Valpierres are very good studies of the French provincial, as seen through the eyes of the boulevardier. Carriard is nothing out of the ordinary. Of course it is not every day that such a collection of individuals are thrown together, but then what are the odds, as long as they are interesting, as these folk surely are?

Outside of being potentially ironical in the idea of the prevalence of luck, there is also a great deal of irony to be found in Capus' choice of characters. In doing this Capus has shown us a rather unflattering picture of a small, but distinctive, group of people that exist in every town over ten thousand. They are those unfortunate people without wealth who are always living from hand to mouth with a few dollars that they have earned here or borrowed there, always hoping that the next ship in will be their's. They are always just at the point of putting the finishing touches on some new enterprise that will net them thousands, but those last touches never seem to reach their destination. Capus has shown us all this in a most cruelly ironic way and with never a detail left out. He has no very good opinion of such people and that phase of life that they represent, and has held them up before our eyes with a slight, tight smile about the lips. We do not see

the smile, but it is there. To a man like Capus, the idea of a man leading such a life as Brignol led is not so much a subject for pity as for derision. He is derisive accordingly, or rather ironical, as he holds before our eyes this picture of Parisian life, silently and unobtrusively. He does this in the way that a mother shows a son, smudged and ragged, to his father, perhaps without expression, yet subtly disapproving.

There are several minor points of irony in the play. The case of Brunet is a good example. A man with the weakness that Brunet had is very often the subject of laughter, and Capus has laughed with the rest. But his laugh has had the slightest bit of an edge, for he does not draw us a picture of this self-conscious old debauchee in what would be called soft tones. The idea that he should be so conscious of his weakness that he trusts his money in the hands of such a person as Brignol in order to prevent his losing it, and yet is not strong enough to conquer his weakness, affords much ironic mirth to Capus.

Another occasion for irony has been found by Capus in the Valpierres from Poitiers. They are most distinctly not of Paris nor of its beliefs. Capus himself came from the provinces, but in due time came to be one who thought and did as the Parisians do. He finds a great deal of amusement in the crotchets and whims of these ultra-respectable people to whom nothing but the orthodox is permitted. Their minds are as rigid and fixed in their self-satisfied atrophy as a piece of petrified wood is unreclaimable, and they are as narrow-minded and bigotted as the characters in a recent American popular novel. Mme. Valpierre is shocked to think that Brignol may

make as much money in a day or two as her husband has amassed by thirty years' patient labor, and in such a low financial way. To the minds of both, the life that Brignol is leading is immoral and not in keeping with God's law, and they are convinced that his only salvation is to return to Poitiers and try to live on the starvation wages that he might earn as a lawyer. And they fight on throughout the play in much this same fashion, always opposing their narrow ideas of the provinces to those of the men of the city, Brignol.

It is possible that there is a great deal of irony in Capus' choice of situation. In Brignol he has taken a man of the type that he is to treat ironically and placed him in very trying circumstances, that are to the average theatre-goer very funny. Just at the time when Brignol should be in the greatest of prosperity he is in very precarious circumstances, in danger of being sued and sold out, and has no way to turn. His case, no matter how convincingly he may talk, can never be very strong for his opinionated relatives. They have come to say "I told you so", and their wish is granted, for things could hardly be in a worse state. It is only the boundless optimism of Brignol that prevents them from breaking him. And the very fact that he is optimistic with his affairs in the condition that they are is a bit ironical. Things are in such an irretrievable mess that an ordinary man would despair at the thought of trying to straighten them out in the manner that Brignol has a mind to use. The only seemingly rational way that there is out of the difficulties is, as his brother-in-law says, to arrange with his creditors and then go to work

and pay his debts as he can. But Brignol is not made of that kind of stuff. Rather, he is glad that he owes only sixty-eight thousand francs, when he was sure that he owed many more than that. So he goes on in his foolishly hopeful way with his incessant: "Tout s'arrangera".

In the next play that comes from the pen of Capus we have something of the same idea of luck. In this particular play, however, there is a strong element of fantasy, for some of the things that happen to Rosine can come only under that head. It is the story of an upright young woman who has been deceived by a man for the first time, and her redemption. Rosine, a young woman of the provinces, has been proposed to by a young gentleman whom we do not see, and he has been accepted. His parents, however, very nasty and small minded villagers, can not see the way to his marriage with a young woman without fortune. Love, however, surmounts all obstacles, and they have lived together for five years, though unmarried. Then, by means of a pretext, the young man is lured to his home in another village where he is compelled to marry a wealthy, but altogether undesirable young woman. His sister, an angular specimen of rusticity, comes to break the news to Rosine, and does so in a very crude and thoughtless way. She even has the effrontery to offer the girl money, and in the end leaves her the possessor of the furniture of the unfortunate household, which by the way she reclaims later. Rosine, undismayed by the turn of events, starts out to earn her own living and is aided by Pagelet, a lawyer, and Mme. Granger, aunt of the man Rosine is to marry. These good people that she is to do all the mending and sewing

for the village wives. They are of course told why it is that Rose is reduced to such a mean degree, and are very solicitous. All goes well for some time and Rosine is successful in warding off lovers of all sorts. There is one young man, Georges Desclos, who is different from his physically minded fellow-citizens, and who pays very earnest court to Rosine whom he loved as a child. He is very poor, however, his yearly earnings being in the neighborhood of eight hundred francs, so there is no immediate prospect of his being accepted by the heroine. While all this is going on, there is another aspirant for her body in the person of one Helion, a manufacturer of the town, who has just been abandoned by his Paris mistress. All she has to do, he tells Rosine, is to write him the simple word yes, and a luxurious apartment in Paris is hers. One day his wife surprises him as he is making various advances to Rose, and her jealous petty mind, which should have become accustomed to being deceived along time ago, sets to work with the result that Rosine is soon boycotted by all the good women, and there is no chance of gaining a livelihood any longer in the town. And to cap the climax the Butauds, through the agency of Lucy, a woman whom I suspect of having complexes, sends a demand for the furniture that they so magnanimously had given Rose. Rose now has no visible means of support and not much of a place left to live in. She is on the point of writing Helion the word "Yes", when Georges happens along at the right time, proposes, and is accepted. They are to go to Paris to try things anew, but they have no money, so the old philosopher gives them the few louis that he has painstakingly saved for improvements

on his farm. With this romanesque note the play ends, and the audience wipes away a few tears and marvels at the skill of M. Capus.

The main element of Capus' idea of fate comes in at the end of the play, as we have seen, but there it is. Although we do ~~not~~ have the boundless optimism of the two lovers, we somehow wonder if Capus' has in his mind as happy a fate as might be for them. The lovers are united in a very romantic fashion which pleases the audience and reminds the critic of *André*, and that is all there is to it. The main thing in the play is, after all, not the mating of another pair of humans, but rather a deft study of provincial manners, and Rosine and Georges are the framework on which it is hung.

The play may be called a French dramatic "Main Street". Capus, himself a hybrid Parisian, takes the provinces to task for their narrowness in matters of moral and ethical conduct. The men of the play are all from the stock of Kennicott, and they act as he acted. Their life is so petty and hide-bound that they snap at Rosine's misfortune as a shark snaps at a fish, and dwell upon it as something outside the bounds of normal human conduct. When they first hear about it, Mme. Helion is prompted to remark:

MME. HELION

La pauvre fille! A-t-elle des enfants?

MME. GRANGER

Des enfants?....Non.

MME. HELION

C'est regrettable!

DESCLOS

Pourquoi?

MME. HELION

Parce que, au cas où elle en aurait eu, notre oeuvre, qui est consacré à l'enfance, lui aurait donné un secours.

MME. GRANGER

En effet.

DESCLOS (à mi-voix)

Si elle avait pu prévoir..... (14)

In this bit of dialogue we have several characters outlined in a very few words. We see clearly the petty self-sufficiency of Mme. Helion, the well-meaning misunderstanding of Mme. Granger, and the wholesome, jovial, good nature of Desclos. He is the armour bearer of Capus in this campaign against "main-streetism" as he found it in the French provinces.

Desclos is one of the masterpieces of character drawing by Capus. He is a philosopher, a jester, and above all a man with a great understanding. He is a man who laughs at the world in order not to cry over it, and he laughs very successfully. He is old as we see him in the play, and death is perhaps not far off. One of his provincial friends rebukes him for talking so freely of death, and he replies: "Pourquoi n'en parlerais-je pas ? Rien n'est plus naturel.. Qu'est-ce que la mort? Un simple formalité..." (15) No simple minded villager would talk about so grave a thing in a like manner. To him all things are big today and little tomorrow. In last words to Georges, after he has taken the news of the approaching marriage and departure for Paris with the utmost calm, and has

even helped along in the announcement, he remarks of the money that he has given the couple that he is going to tell his sister about it, but "Oh! pas tout de suite... Je lui apprendrai ça à la longue, peu à peu, en m'amusant... J'aurai là quelques bonnes soirées... Ah! ah!" (16) So he bids them the best of luck and promises to visit them the next year. Here we have a spartan father. There are no tears, no protests at Georges' leaving; there is no parsimony, for does he not give all his savings to Georges voluntarily? There is only the utmost broadmindedness, entire fairness, and a kindness that life in the provinces does not often have.

Then the supreme example of the provincial is found in the person of Lucy Butaud. She is narrow-minded, vindictive, stingy, has strange ideas about social rank for one of the bourgeoisie, and is painfully superstitious, all of which are traits of the common person of the provinces.

Rosine is a somewhat serious play, and for that reason the irony is in the characters, rather than in the situations. One critic sums it up as follows: "a deft study of provincial manners, written on broad lines. In this sense it is a true piece of work, complete and well thought out. It presents at the same time a section of humanity and an author.. The treatment of that section of humanity gives evidence of scrupulous care, a desire to enter into the field of actual experience, and makes us feel when and how the action begins, develops, and is carried to a logical and fitting close." (17) And this, all in all, is a just criticism.

In La Veine Capus comes out openly for his theory that

luck is the main determinant in man's destiny, so openly that he calls the play "luck". And it is indeed luck that makes things happen as they do. The long arm of coincidence is given a hard stretch in this play, which is one of the most successful that Capus has done. Charlotte Lanier, proprietress of a flower shop that she has come to after having started in very mean circumstances. Above her shop there lives a lawyer, Julien Bréard, who has no clients. He induces her to go to Havre with him for a week-end, and when at last her little shop has perished under the hands of its multitudinous creditors, they establish themselves in his ~~apartment~~. He still has no clients, but one day there comes the ex-employee of Charlotte, Josephine, who has established a liaison with a wealthy young man, with the news that she has work for Bréard. It seems that her lover, Edmond Tourneur, desires to sue certain newspapers for libel of his dead father. Bréard takes charge, and being no ignoramus, he arranges things for Tourneur to his satisfaction and ends up by being given control of all the affairs of that young man, who is too apathetic to manage them himself. They are invited to his summer home, and there Bréard meets an adventuress with whom he falls in love, forgetting about Charlotte, who has been tutoring to make herself worthy of him. Meantime he is elected deputy through special chance, and the associates that he has made in his connection with Tourneur. His new flame, Simone Baudrin, is an old experienced hand, and he succeeds only in making a fool of himself. Since he has risen so meteorically and to such position, he thinks that the bourgeoisie little proprietress of the flower shop that was is not good enough for him. He soon

sees his error, and after he has been tried by Josephine and found true, he is again greeted by Charlotte, and the play ends as they are starting for the town from which he was elected to get married.

Breard is something of the type of Brignol, in that he is not inclined to work very hard, but he has not the stupendous imagination of our dreaming high-financier. As one of the characters describes him, he is: "Avocat sans clients, paresseux et ambitieux à la fois, egoïste; aucun avenir, à moins d'une chance extraordinaire que rien ne fait prévoir; couvert de dettes." (18) Save that the speaker shows just a trifle of malice, the whole description is only too true. But the chance that is not foreseen does come, and it comes in the person of Josephine. From then on one chance after another leads on up a step at a time until he is deputy from his department and is well on the way to that fame that merits slanderous gossip in the newspapers.

If the potential irony that is to be found in Capus' philosophy of luck be applied to La Veine, we find that we have here a great piece of irony. We find a statement of the luck theory in Bréard's speech: "Je ne suis pas superstitieux... Je crois tout homme un peu bien doué, pas trop sot, pas trop timide, et dans sa vie son heur de veine, un moment quand les autres hommes semblent travailler pour lui, où les fruits viennent se mettre à portée de sa main pour qu'il les cueille. Cette-heur-là, ma petite Charlotte, c'est triste à dire, mais ce n'est pas ni le travail, ni la patience qui nous la donnent." (19)

In the character of Bréard there has been placed not a little irony, as we see disclosed before our eyes. He does not

change during the play, but is a static character, for at the end he is fundamentally as lazy as he was when the curtain first rose, and he has shown himself colossally egotistical in his affair with Simone Baudrin. This fixity of his character is in itself ironic to some degree. Capus evidently does not approve of a man that changing events do not affect.

And the progress that such a man as Breard makes in the world is open to very broad irony. In speaking of this or that unfortunate happening, we say that it was "the irony of fate", meaning thereby that fate has taken things in her own hands with a caprice that is contrary to all expectations. That is a cruel irony. But may we not suppose the reverse of this, that when things look very dark fate again takes things in hand and with a happy caorice gives something that is very much to be desired, instead of the expected awful outcome? That is kindly irony.

This kindly iron is what we have in La Veine, in that everything happens as it should, although it does not seem possible. One happy thing after another happens for Breard, who is a rather charming man, but faulty. At the beginning of the play we have not the slightest idea that he will ever be anything but the mediocre lawyer tght he is, living four or five floors up in a not very select district of Paris. But the happy irony of fate and the dramatist have decreed otherwise, and he is in the end embarked upon a promising political career in an office furnished with English furniture. It is this same gentle irony that keeps him out of the clutches of Simone Baudrin and brings him back to the kindly arms of Charlotte.

Chapter IV.

CAPUS AND DIVORCE.

In to^yw of his most interesting plays, Capus has dealt with the problem of divorce, but perhaps with no very great finality, nor yet with any desire to appear final. He has merely looked out over the broad vista of present day divorce and formed his boulevard opinions about the matter. And these are, of course, not those of a man with any very great illusions about life. He has made his own little system, and in it he has left a place for what our modern moralists look upon as a grave danger. Capus finds it anything but a danger. To him it is rather a subject for much sardonic amusement.

In the first play in which he attacks the problem, there is very little of the serious, for the play is a flip, Parisian comedy about a most engaging little person who just can't stay married, if the tenets of the old regime are to be held to. This play, Les Maris de Leontine, 1900, has to do with the escapades of a pert young lady named Leontine. She has, it would seem, led her husband a meryⁿ life, and he has, after enduring as much as his staid soul would allow, allowed her to divorce him. She has deceived him with all the simplicity of a child playing with dolls, has been extravagant, and has in general shattered most of the illusions that the poor man had about her. And she has taken the divorce as a mere matter of course. As Adolphe says, she has taken it "très gaiement, comme elle avait pris le mariage, et sans y attacher plus d'importance. Puis elle est entrée dans la galanterie qui était sa véritable vocation." (20)

And she has been most impudently getting large sums of money from the long-suffering Adolphe in spite of the remonstrances of his friends. Things seem to go from bad to worse and one day she wanders into Adolphe's apartment with the naïve announcement that she has no money, and will ask for none, but that she will put up with him for a few days until something turns up. She is something of a female Micawber, is Léontine. She has been sold out, and declines to go to any of her friends, for she has had the bright idea of coming to Adolphe. He is very properly scandalized and tries everything that he can think of to dislodge her, but stay she will. After she has disrupted the whole scheme of his life, and has taken to receiving guests of rather shady characters, Adolphe goes off to the provinces with his friend Plantin. Then there enters the story the Baron de la Jambière, as the unrequited lover of Léontine. And we also get a glimpse of the savant Anatole, of whom we are to see more later. And after a time Léontine marries the Baron, as a matter of course, as though she were trying to experience as many husbands as possible before too late. She has the future to look out for, too, and it is not so bad, one would imagine, to make one's living by being a baroness. But her volatile nature is not long contented with the Baron, who, it must be admitted, is rather stupid, and she busies herself with Anatole, who does not know quite what it is all about, but after a time becomes enamoured of her. The intrigue is discovered by the amusing old royalist aunt of the Baron, who advises him as to his wife's fidelity. He is hurt. There has been an assignation made, and the Baron and his aunt plot to surprise the two culprits. They do so,

finding Léontine in a rather distressing state of negligence, and the prefect of police is summoned to take the complaint. By the irony of fate and the dramatist, the prefect is none other than Adolphe, who has been appointed to the office through his friend Plantin. He sees the state of things and after much earnest counsel, convinces the Baron that he must not divorce Léontine. This suggestion is acted on, and in due time Adolphe and the Baron become fast friends. And Léontine, as gay as ever, turns match-maker, and ends up by marrying off Adolphe to Hortense, the cousin of the Baron, after a thrilling time trying to keep her past connection with Adolphe secret. So everything ends happily, and we hope that Léontine has at last found the true fidelity.

So here we have Capus' ironic philosophy about divorce. His protagonist in the play is, of course, the amusing Adolphe, who counsels the Baron that the best thing that he can do is to stay married to Léontine. As he says to the Baron:

"Vous ne savez donc pas ce que c'est un divorce. Vous ne rendez pas compte de tous les tracasseries, de toutes les complications qui en résultent! Conférences avec les avoués et avec les avocats, plaidoiries publiques, devant tous vos concitoyens alléchés par le scandale, où l'avocat de la partie adverse parlera avec indignation de la grossièreté de vos mœurs, de vos habitudes... Si vous le défiez (i.e.: l'avocat), il en dira le double. Il se montrera surpris que votre femme ait attendu si longtemps pour vous tromper, il insinuera que si elle n'était pas un ange de vertu, elle aurait déserté le domicile conjugal après la première nuit de noces, il inventera sur votre vie privée des histoires croustillantes qui feront la joie de toute la ville, et vous serez peut-être par-dessus le marché, condamné à faire une forte pension à madame la Baronne." (21)

And Adolphe goes on to paint a picture of the possible future of a divorced woman, that she may have no money, no family, and no one to whom to turn, and she will probably end up that

most odious of things, in the eyes of the moral Adolphe, a "cocotte". And all that is hardly, when all is said and done, the true philosophy of such a man as we are led to believe Adolphe to be. A man of the seeming moral inclinations that Adolphe seems to be would hardly balk at a few personal inconveniences, when it was a question getting free from a lewd woman. It is rather the free and easy opinion of the egoistic boulevardier, of a man who is too lethargic, or too disinterested in principle, to allow himself to be jarred from his narrow and self-sufficient ways of life. And it is quite possible that Capus sincerely believed the dicta of Adolphe, at least when he was writing it. For he is a cynic, and to such a man the things that tradition holds most dear are not worth a farthing, when there is the possibility of a greater unhappiness. There is less of the theoretic in this play than in Les Deux Ecoles, a later play with a similar subject. Reasons here are very material, the reasons of an epicurean, or perhaps of a hedonist. It is a matter of choosing the lesser of two evils, which in this case happens to be infidelity, as opposed to the inconvenience of a public divorce scandal. In other words, we have here the philosophy of a self-indulgent man who sees nothing in life but what little ease one can extract from it.

In the next play of the same subject, Les Deux Ecoles, 1902, we have a little different treatment of divorce, although it is still seen through the eyes of the cynical boulevardier. In this play, however, we have a little more explicit directions given for the avoidance of divorce. The play has to do with the

separation of Henriette from her husband (who is fundamentally a good enough husband), because he is given to having "bonnes amies". This goes against the inclinations of Henriette, who is something of the same type of woman as Leontine, except that her inspirations are always in a moral direction, and that she has a very definite moral standard which she holds to with a great deal of vehemence. As a result she holds to her determination to divorce Edouard, in spite of the advice of both her mother and father. So they are divided by law, and Edouard proceeds to amuse himself with the mistress that he has picked out, even before the proceedings had been started, much to the consternation of his father-in-law, who is something of a gay dog himself. Henriette takes up with the politician le Hautois, a staid, serious old fellow, who is the personification itself--so Henriette thinks. Things go on, and by various ways, Edouard falls in love with his ex-wife, and frequents her father's house a great deal. When he proposes, and it is brought out that the main reason that he deceived Henriette was that he did not wish to appear stupid, she sends him packing in very short order. The date for her wedding with le Hautois is set, and all the preparations for the establishment of a new household are under way. Then, one day, she finds Estelle, the former mistress of Edouard who is out for bigger game, in the arms of her hitherto impeccable le Hautois, and is thoroughly disillusioned. She decides that women were made to be deceived, and thinking that she would rather be deceived by Edouard than by le Hautois, she accepts him and announces that she does not wish to know anything about his future "bonnes amies", although she is convinced

that they will come.

In this play there is not the same airy, semi-farcical treatment of the subject that we have in Les Maris de Léontine, although there is a tone of sophistication and cynicism throughout the play that removes it from the more serious attempts of Capus. The whole thing is artificial, for that matter, but the dramatist has painted so skillful veil over it that it is not readily obvious.

The conception of the dramatist that all husbands can be arbitrarily into two schools, as he puts it into the mouth of Mme. Joulin, is not true. Says she:

"Un mari exact à l'heure des repas et exact à l'heure du berger! Eh bien, ma fille, ce n'est pas possible! Il y a d'un côté la vie fantaisiste et de l'autre la vie réelle. Il faut choisir; on ne peut pas mener les deux successivement douze heures par jour. Parbleu! je crois bien que ce serait le rêve! Mais la nature n'a pas voulu que nous fissions ce rêve-là! Laquelle de ces deux existences vaut le mieux? Ça, par exemple, je n'en sais rien. Et comme dit ton père quand il joue au piquet, il y a deux écoles." (23)

To her mind there can be only two kinds of husbands: those who are amusing and deceive you, and those who are dull and do not deceive you. That is just a little short-sighted, for might not a husband be dull and deceive you, as well as a husband might be amusing and not deceive you. Many women profess to have found this latter sort. The way that she makes life at all interesting with a Don Juan for a husband is to ignore his doings. She says:

"La femme, la vraie femme, telle du moins que je la comprends, ne doit jamais chercher à savoir si elle est trompée. Nous sommes trop supérieures en général à nos maris, pour nous préoccuper de ces détails. Et les hommes ne méritent même pas que nous attachions tant d'importance à leurs fautes. Qu'ils nous trompent, si ça leur fait plaisir! Quant à nous, nous devons rester non seulement dans la doute, mais dans une dédaigneuse ignorance..." (24)

This is the idea of no ordinary woman, as one can easily see. It is rather that of the ideal woman of the boulevardier, the woman whom he thinks possibly he might marry, if there were any such, and then leans back with the contented knowledge that there are none of that species extant. For such a man is one who has no desire to have his pleasure curtailed by need of endless explanation as to the way in which he has achieved it. And back of all this there is the accompanying irony that there is not, for that reason of non-existence, and can not be any very happy solution of the problem under present conditions, customs, and beliefs. And the dramatist can see no reason why there should be any need of a solution, why there should be all this hullabaloo over something that is very convenient and useful. For somehow one feels that, as he reads the pages of this play, there is a sardonic grin on the face of Capus as he puts his puppets through their paces.

We have a slight recurrence to the idea of luck and fate in this play in the words of Estelle, the "bonne amie" of Edouard:

"Je suis devenue....Comment appelle-t-on ça..Ah oui, fataliste. Il m'arrivera ce qu'il voudra maintenant; tout ça, ça m'est égal. Et vous comprenez que je ne me fais guère d'illusions, n'est-ce pas? Il va m'en arriver des aventures, et des drôles...."(22)

This is the same thought that we have expressed by Julien Bréard in La Veine, with a slightly different application, perhaps in this case, but still fundamentally germane to that same idea. Les Deux Ecoles, which came the year after La Veine, is in a different manner, but Capus has not yet got entirely away from the fancies of the earlier plays, for ideas do not change as readily as habits.

In these two plays, Les Paris de Léontine and Les Deux Ecoles, Capus has made, for the ironist, a most scathing denunciation of one of the most striking phenomena of Paris, or as it now is, of most any large city, regardless of country. The marrying woman, whom divorce has fostered, and divorce itself, do not get a very gentle treatment in the hands of this dramatic gargoyle of the Boul' Mich'. He finds things deplorable, but not for the orthodox and rational reason. He finds that divorce, in spite of the layman to the contrary, is not nearly as necessary as it is made out to be, that it is deucedly inconvenient, and that as a cure it is worse than the ill. To bring this new idea to perfection, he goes on to say in the second play that the best way to avoid the whole thing is to practice self-delusion, for what we do not know will not hurt us, and that if married folk must sin let them keep it to themselves and not bother their partners with confession. Here we have the crowning irony of the whole problem. The dramatist has shown us that happiness can come only through self-delusion, but the suppression of fact, and through the glossing over of truth, and that, I believe, is monstrously ironical. For we have the same idea expressed by the cynical Relling in Ibsen's "Wild Duck", when toward the last of the play he says: "Rob the average man of his life-illusion, and you rob him of his happiness at the same stroke." (25) And the truth, such as it is, of his statement is borne out by the Ekdals, who are happy through self-delusion, and who are thrown into a turmoil and great unhappiness by the coming of the mistaken idealist, Gregers Werle. And there the matter stands.

Chapter V.

CAPUS AND THE NEW WOMAN.

With in the last two decades or so, woman has stepped forth as something more than a fireside companion. She is no longer content to sew, and bake, and brew, but has through various agents come to desire the liberty enjoyed by men. This is not a new or startling fact, for at present most of the world is cognizant of it, and probably three-fourths of this same world are busy deploring the state of things. But the movement, perhaps first supported first by Ibsen in his "Doll's House", and today we have votes for women, women legislators, financiers, and whatnot. That the movement is still crescent is beside the point. Women started out on her own, and is still intent upon the goal, such as it is, and today we even read of a woman who took unto herself a wife.

Twenty years or so ago, Capus touched somewhat on this social phenomenon in one of his first plays, La Petite Fonctionnaire 1900. He did something that had never been done before; he treated the economically independent woman. In this he anticipated Brieux, who did the same thing more seriously some eleven years later. Suzanne Borel, a comely young woman, having been deprived of her parents and fortune, has entered the postal service, and eventually been stationed as postmistress at Pressigny-sur-Loire. She proves to be an excellent public servant, although she makes some changes that are not appreciated by the villagers. They resent two mail deliveries in the same day, since that gives them their evening papers in the evening, a thing that is quite displeasing,

for they are accustomed to waiting until the next morning to read their news. And the fact that Suzanne, and does sketches on Sunday causes no little talk about the town. This does not bother her particularly, for she has many of the ways of the city, and is content with the knowledge that she is doing her duty faithfully. She makes a decided impression on the men of the town, especially Pagenel who has been married so long that he is getting tired of being faithful to his wife. He becomes enamoured of the young lady, and on the advice of his gay friend Lebardin endeavors to establish her in Paris as his mistress. She has always been virtuous and can see no reason for changing her ways. Meantime, however, she has met the Vicomte de Samblin, but contrary to the statements of her gamin helper Riri, she does not fall in love with him, for he is an ill-educated and not particularly graceful member of the pampered nobility. At least that is what she thinks. But the day that the invitation for his marriage of convenience with Hermance Liseuil comes, and he gives her one, there comes the very sudden realization to her that she does love him, and she tells him as much in a restrained but haughty manner. The marriage is not broken for this new-found love for the next that we see of Suzanne is when we discover her in the apartment that Pagenel has furnished for her in Paris, as he had promised. She has found that it was rather unliveable in Pressigny after the marriage of the man that she loved with another woman, who, to make things worse, is an old friend of hers. She has allowed the suggested arrangement, but has not done everything that the old philanderer has expected. She merely allows him to touch the ends of her fingers. He and

Lebardin have come to Paris "bunburying" and are having tea with Suzanne. There has been some ridiculous pretext or other for the trip, but things seem to have gone wrong, for the uncle that Pagenel was supposed to visit arrives in Pressigny to visit him while he is away. Thereupon that worthy man's wife smells a rat, and she sets out for Paris in company with Mme. Pagenel. They arrive at the apartment while Suzanne is treating the rheumatism that Pagenel has acquired while routing about, and things are made rather awkward for the deceivers. Just before this, Pagenel and his "bonne amie" have met the Vicomte, who is in Paris alone, for as we learn later his marriage has been anything but successful. His wife, immediately after the marriage, has taken up with the man whom she has loved all the time. This is too much for the Vicomte and he has come to Paris to forget his troubles. He comes to call on Suzanne, after the smoke has partly cleared away, and the culprits have been more or less cleared of their suspected misdeeds. They are to be taken home, cured of all desire for sin. Suzanne finds that she still loves the Vicomte, and he finds that he loves her more than he had thought. The thrifty Lebardin sees his chance to clear the matter up financially, sells the furnishings and good will of the apartment to the Vicomte, and comes back to interrupt Suzanne's final surrender with the key, as the curtain falls.

The realism of the play is not particularly questionable, although it is that peculiar sort of realism that belongs to Capus, characterised as 'selective'. He started out with the idea of a postmistress in a small provincial town, but to do what he wanted to with her he had to look around for other particular

characters. She had been a virtuous young woman as he had conceived her, mainly because she was an independent woman and he had to have a foil for her. He found them in the persons of Lebardin and Pagenel, so they have to be in the play. Naturally the men have to have wives, and as they were provincial folk, these wives were made militant in their ideas as to domestic fidelity. And then there had to be someone for Suzanne to fall in love with, both an ordinary and an extraordinary young man, so the Vicomte was created for the part. This gave him his main characters, and the minor ones were as they had to be under the circumstances. It is highly doubtful, though, if one ordinary village would hold the various types, few as they are, that we have used in this play. And the circumstances and situations that they find themselves in are created, although they have been given the gloss of reality. Actually, Suzanne would probably have led a very ordinary and hum-drum existence in Pressigny. Instead we have very interesting characters in amusing situations, so "the play's the thing."

There are two important sources of irony in the play. The first, of course, is the treatment of the woman with a career. Capus in his position of boulevardier and cynic gives us no little delicate irony in his handling of Suzanne. He has first of all been ironic in the very choice of his subject. His view of woman, in his quality of Parisian celibate, is hardly that of the normal or ordinary man. To his mind a woman is something to amuse oneself with, and to buy trinkets for. The thought of a woman taking life seriously enough to go out and work for an honest living probably caused him to smile wryly. And it gave

him the idea of writing a play about her. His treatment of the self-supporting woman is anything but the serious and defensive treatment of Ibsen, and of the later Frenchmen. But he does attack the problem, and might be said to speak more than he thinks, in spite of the fact that he has no interest in social problems as such. While he shows many of the bad angles in the life of the independent woman, they are not as important as he makes them, so that in the end we have a fair brief for the new woman.

There is a bolder irony, though in the dramatists treatment of the provincial town and its inhabitants. His work here is not quite as emphatic as it was in Rosine, but it is anything but a weak attack. He has taken more specialized items in the petty prejudices and crotchets of a small town and held them up disapprovingly. For instance, the incident of Suzanne's piano and her sketching, is a case in point. And the dislike of the townspeople at getting their newspapers in the evening, is yet another. There are other cases of the same sort, and the whole thing goes to make up the irony of the dwellers of a French mainstreet. The stupidity of the men of the town is shown in the almost pathetic efforts of Pagenel and Lebaradin to find amusement, and their having to go to Paris as a last resort. As before said, the arraignment is not as complete as in Rosine, but it is more obvious than the irony of the new woman.

There is something more or less predominant in this play that has not been met in any of the others. That is sentimentality. Chandler accuses Capus of being a sentimentalist, somewhat in the manner of Schnitzler. (26) The sentimentality in this play

hinges on the virtue of Suzanne, and of her and the dramatist's trial by fire, so that she may come out at the end as immaculate as she entered. The fact that she so nobly left Pressigny when she saw that the man she loved was irretrievably married, and the brave way in which she bore up under the strain of unrequited love are other phases of this same sentimentality. The ending of the play reminds me of the only novel by Robert W. Chambers I have ever read, where the heroine gave the keys to her bedroom to her husband after many months. But the tone of the play as a whole is not so bad as that.

Again in this work there is something predominant idea of La Veine shows up again. And that is the philosophy of luck or chance. One example will suffice. Riri is telling Suzanne that she is not the mistress of her emotions. Suzanne has just said that she will fall in love with whom she likes when she decides to. To which Riri replies:

"Vous me faites rire, vous aussi, avec vos idées. Est-ce que vous le savez de qui vous serez amoureuse. Non, ma chère, vous ne le savez pas. Ce sera peut-être d'un paysan, comme peut-être dans dix ans, mais oui! Vous êtes comme les camarades. On ne vous enverra une dépêche la veille pour vous prévenir. Et un beau matin, en vous reveillant, vous vous apercevrez que vous êtes amoureuse. Ça vous sera venu pendant la nuit." (27)

Here is the old fatalistic idea that one does not command his own fate, but that he is to receive whatever his lot may be. And this statement is borne out by Suzanne's sudden perception for her love of the Vicomte.

Another play of somewhat the same type as La Petite Fonctionnaire is Les Favorites, 1911. In this we have a different phase of the new woman, in that in the play we have three am-

bitious women, one of whom wants to make her name on the stage as quickly as possible, another wishes to make her way into high society, and another wishes to further the interests of her lover, a journalist. Godfish, an English Jew, Branchin, and villerbois have been given the idea of establishing a new newspaper in Paris by either their wives or their mistresses. They finally agree among themselves that it is the only way to keep peace, and act accordingly. They enlist Bourdolle, minister of education, as editor-in-chief, after he has had trouble in his department, and things seem to be getting along very nicely. Then Bourdolle falls in love with a young woman on his staff, his wife finds it out, and they separate. He pursues his affair with Luce, the woman in the case, and it is only through the efforts of the kindly old Comtesse that the husband and wife are reconciled, and the reconciliation is indirect at that. For Mme. Bourdolle has, in one way and another, gained the promise of the office of prime minister of France for her erring husband. The news of this comes and there is need of a new editor of Ciel et Terre. Godfish comes with the suggestion that they make Lahure his successor, for he is indeed a very brilliant historian, although he has a constant need of money because of his ridiculous affair with Bianca, who has scared him into submission.. So the play ends happily, although ironically.

This play, not the best of those of Capus was a great success when given in Paris in December, 1911. The town liked it because it did not see through it..

As a matter of fact it is a very definite dig at the Parisian public. The idea that women of the type that we find

represented in this play could get as far as they did was very definite irony in the hands of Capus. They were all ambitious, and strange to say, their ambitions were all granted by the ironic will of the dramatist. Mme. Villerbois did gain a certain entrance into society, and Godfish did please his mistress, and Lahure came out decidedly higher than when he went in, but it was all due to the caprice of the playwright. The idea that people can lead a life such as the people we meet in this play, and like it, is somehow impossible to conceive in the mind of the dramatist. So he has shown it in its true colors with all its petty deceits, its cruelty, its shallowness, its unscrupulousness, its blindness, but above all its humours. The man Lahure is a truly drawn character, but his inability, his lethargy, and his awkwardness in his affaires de coeur, in spite of his being a Parisian, and his chronic impecuniosity make him a human and sympathetic person.

That may be called irony, and perhaps that is what it is, but when one really wants to he can read irony into everything that Capus ever wrote, just as the Ibsenists have found about ninety per cent more symbolism in Ibsen than he ever put there.

Chapter VI.

CAPUS AND HIGH FINANCE.

In every society, no matter of what country, there has developed a type of family that is sociologically and economically out of place. They are very often the third generation of an individual who originally brought the stock to financial safety. The second generation gained, perhaps, social standing at the expense of the family fortune, thereby leaving the third generation with position but without the means of properly keeping it up. So they drift on, trying to keep up appearances with the funds that would keep an honest bourgeois family more than comfortable. And with this impecuniosity there comes a certain unscrupulousness that leads the individuals to all sorts of petty tricks and efforts to better their condition, much to the dismay and disgust of their associates. Capus, in spite of his possible social anarchy, has a sense of traditional decorum that makes him look dubiously on such doings. We have an idea that he thinks that everyone, no matter what his position may be, should live within his income.

Accordingly, in La Bourse ou la vie, 1900, he has shown us a family in the condition sketched above. Jacques Herbaut, an easy-going engineer, has been content to live on his small income. But thanks to an extravagant wife he soon runs through both income and principle. The news comes from his solicitor, when he is expecting it least, that he is bankrupt, or as he puts it, "décavé". The only thing that remains is a small property in Limoges. He takes the energetic resolution that he

and his wife are going there to live, and try to recoup. But H  l  ne, his wife, finds this entirely out of the question. They are not the only ones in Paris in that fix, so that is no reason for leaving the world of pleasure and gaiety for the provinces. So they stay, since Jacques is anything but energetic. Things go on, but become anything but better. Jacques is at last reduced to the level where he borrows money from a groom. Meantime we have learned of the love of le Houssel for H  l  ne, something rather surprising to his friends in view of the fact that he is more given to cocottes than he is to society women. After practically an act finding out the condition of the Herbauts, relief is brought in the person of Pervenche, an old acquaintance of Helene. She is the mistress of one Brassac, a parvenu little esteemed by the crowd that the Herbauts belong to. But when H  l  ne sees in him a possible solution of their dilemma, she becomes very cordial with Pervenche, in spite of the fact that she is little more than an ordinary woman of the streets.

In the next act we find that she has managed to get Jacques an offer of partnership with Brassac, in spite of the fact that Jacques does not want and has no money to put in the firm. This is because the parvenu brassac has aspirations to break into society, as we say in this country, and in Jacques he sees the lever that he needs. Jacques can introduce him to many influential men and get him into the club that he wants. So the papers are signed, after Brassac has got the poor man drunk, and things seem to be coming along better than was expected. Brassac, by means of his good nature has persuaded all his cocottes and their latest loves to leave their money with him to play the

stock market with and is very successful. Herbaut has also profitted by the association and has become very good friends with the jovial speculator. This last gentleman has a large operation under way in England and it looks as though he is due to make a formidable amount of money. And he has progressed in society. He has fallen in love with a South American countess, who is incidentally very wealthy. Then the crash comes, and he is ruined. The only thing for him to do is to fly the country for the partnership contract makes Jacques responsible for all debts. He acts accordingly, and Jacques ends up in a debtors' prison very much against his will. Things look very dark, and the irrepressible Hélène goes to le Houssel for a loan to get Jacques out of jail. He is very willing to oblige, but endeavors to make certain little arrangements that Helene cleverly avoids. She gets the money and takes it to Jacques and tells him with charming naivete about le Houssel. He immediately sends the check back. Things are as thick as ever, when the astonishing Brassac walks into the prison. He had fled the country right enough, but being very far gone over the countess, he had tried to sneak back into the country to her. He was seen by one of his ex-loves and reported to the police. The countess is loyal to him, though, and settles his affairs out of her own fortune. This is very lovely, and Brassac is filled at once with all sorts of new plans. He has a little paper that Jacques can sign.... But Jacques is through, and the pair decide to go to Limoges, for Hélène has had just about enough high finance. So the play ends.

This play gives us a very interesting picture of some good people who are without money and are trying to get it

quickly and unscrupulously. Nemesis comes justly, and they see the proper way out. It has been a rather heart-racking lesson, though. The irony, such as it is, is to be found in the realism itself. Wherever one may be he does not have to look far for this type of family for as Hélène says: "Tout le monde est décafé à Paris." (28) And she speaks truer than she thinks. The existence of the species does not need any very great proof. These people, in the eyes of Capus, are but little better than social parasites, with their petty borrowing and underhanded methods of making money. As a result he shows them up with the strictest realism without any extenuation whatever. Perhaps, though, he may hold a brief for Herbaut, who has the best of intentions but hasn't the strength to live up to them. The play is an accurate and unflattering portrait of a definite stratum of Parisian society, and it is the picture of a stratum that Capus does not think ought to exist.

A large indictment that Capus has of the "decave" is that in his need he takes up with men of questionable financial workings, as did our friend Herbaut. Brassac, the French parvenu, is something of the prototype of a once very popular magazine hero in this country, Wallingford. He has been treated in a more general way than was the American, but he has all the joviality and good-fellowship of that amiable crook. With the increasing power of money this type of individual has become more and more common, and they are so under foot nowadays that we pay no attention to them. But at the time Capus wrote his play they were not so common, since to put one of them on the stage was considered quite a novelty. Brassac is a human enough figure,

and we can not help feeling a little sympathetic for him in spite of the fact that he is what he is. For Brassac is a *déclassé*--he doesn't fit in. He started from very humble beginnings and by his sharpness and foresight has come into a certain amount of money. He has made no social progress, though, and that is the thing that he wants most to accomplish. He has his automobiles, and his girls, and his ridiculous built-in bar, but he is not happy. He must gain an entrance into the monde. That is why he is sportsman enough to take Herbaut as partner, in spite of the fact that he is penniless. Jacques can do the thing for him that he could never do himself, get him by the gates of that long-sought land--"society". Then his little world will be complete. In France, where money-making is till more or less frowned upon by the elite, this seems an almost impossible thing, but it is just such people as the Herbauts that are responsible for men like Brassac getting into the best clubs and circles. The self-made man is not wanted. In this country of course the self-made ~~man~~ is very desirable, the more self-made the better. So, such a man as Brassac, in the situation that we see him in, may be very literally done, but at the same time there must be some malice in the portrayal, especially when he comes from the pen from such a self-sufficient man as Capus.

Another character that gives Capus no little amusement is the sometime mistress of Brassac, Pervenche. There is of course the direct irony of the life that she is leading, always being betrayed by this man or that with the promise of marriage. Her lasting hope and her everlasting denial, humorous as they are, are nevertheless tragic irony. But we also have the happy irony

of her finding of her first love, Georges, as an attendant in the debtors' prison. But there is also a dig at the society that can cause the existence of such a person, this perpetual plaything of men to be cast aside as soon as the novelty has worn off a bit. She is humoured a bit by the happy ending that Capus has given her affairs, but that may possibly be laid at the door of his sentimentality.

There is one instance in the play where Capus uses direct satire. That is in the burlesque picture of a French debtors' prison, with its extravagant appointments and its college trained guards. I know nothing about French prisons, but the idea may be an attack on them, or on the judiciary for its treatment of debtors. At any rate the idea is amusing, even to an Angle-Saxon. Another example might be in the bar of Brassac. It is possible that this is an attack on the extravagant bad taste of the new-rich.

Technically the play might be improved, and the issues might be more unified than they are, for the play is more a slice of life than are some of Capus' other plays. But it gets across as it is, and is probably far smoother in presentation than it appears in a casual reading. The group photographs that we have here are delightful.

Chapter VII.

CONCLUSION.

Emile de Saint-Auban, in his volume on the theatre, has a chapter called "Le Sourire de l'anarchie," in which he calls Capus a social anarchist. He thinks that Capus is a man opposed to existing modes and manners, and that he is the philosopher of disorder. As he says:

"Le stimulant qui pique sa fantaisie est la haine bienveillante, l'animosité sans fiel qu'on nomme: la vie régulière. Cette régularité, tissée par les codes, les préjugés, semblent à notre écrivain la pire des constitutions, et l'ordre bourgeois lui apparaît comme le plus périlleux des désordres" (29)

And this author goes on to say that the only thing that can comfort Capus for this state of things is a father-in-law who does not care a great deal for custom, or a virtuous cocotte like Mlle. Pervenche who has lovers but is looking for a husband, and who is very superior to the women who have a husband and are looking for lovers.

So he goes about upsetting, for himself at least, some of the established codes of conduct and deriving a great deal of pleasure from this exercise. He is never militant in his warfare, if such it be, but is rather like a cat that caresses you as it scratches. But the scratch is never very deep. For his method is largely that of irony, as we see, from character and situation. He is restive and the ordinary, though it may have its problems, holds no interest for him. And he is restive with more than a single order of things, for he has something to say against the provinces as well as the metropolis. He can paint a French "Main Street", as he did in Rosine, or he can turn his guns on

the city as he did in Les Favorites or La Bourse ou la vie. He was transplanted to the city while young and set about getting as much of its spirit as he could. He did this consciously, however, and as he acquired the tang of the boulevards he was still enough of his original self to be able, probably, to look at things rather coldly and see all their faults and shortcomings. He followed his inclinations, though, and as a result he has great deal of the spirit of the city in him. But because he did what he did so consciously, and used his earlier standards as a basis of comparison, he has retained even today much of his provincial nature. As a result he has a way of looking at his subject from two angles. The opinions of either of his natures are not hard and fast ones of either of the environments from which he drew them, but rather a synthesis of the two. He sees the bad of both sources and points it out accordingly. This is a very strange faculty, and it has been reached through a certain mind, which in turn may be due to his earlier scientific training.

So Capus is a painter of the disorganisation of France as he sees it. M. de Saint-Auban goes on to say:

"Il peint si gentiment notre désorganisation qui, peut-être, est le point de départ d'une organisation nouvelle!..... Il a la décomposition aimable et, avec lui, on s'abandonne aux douceurs d'un irrespect qui ne sied pas trop mal au désarrôis de notre décadence où les principes ne sont plus à la mode, où les lois font mine de devenir des préjugés et où il n'y a guère plus, en somme, que l'imprévu qui arrive....."(30)

So he is something of an anarchist. Not the bomb throwing variety, but rather the parlor sort, who amuse themselves much with their new theories on manners, customs, and institutions, but are too lazy and inactive to actually practice what they preach. They

are more interested in theory for itself than in any practical reform. They dwell in the land of the dread Hypothesis. Capus sees that the times are changing, but is more interested in guessing as to which way they will turn rather than in trying to direct their turning. And he is too much of the cynic to take it very seriously.

He is interested rather in taking individual cases and phenomena and examining them and exhibiting them under his own microscope for what they are worth. For, after all, he is just a dramatist who designs to amuse, and does so although his work is tinctured with his own peculiar self, which is the product of two almost opposed environments. And he does amuse us.

"Jolis traits, scènes curieuses, observations aiguës qui dessinent gentiment les coins de la société, voilà bien, n'est-ce pas, l'habituel bagage de M. Alfred Capus, le plus gai, le plus souriant, le plus léger des anarchistes... sinon le moins dangereux....." (31).

But it is to be doubted if one gains many converts with sardonic laughter.

THE END.

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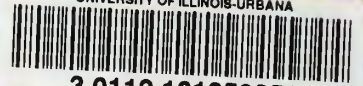
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